

Insider Information: Advisors' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Enhanced Advising Programs for Community College Students

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This study examines the structure of an enhanced advising program (EAP) through the perspectives of academic advisors. Utilizing a qualitative research design, interviews were conducted with 12 primary-role academic advisors employed within an EAP at a large, urban community college in Texas. Thematic analysis of the interviews identified the following distinguishing characteristics of EAPs: (1) improved student participation in academic advising; (2) stronger student engagement with advising; and (3) proactive construction of an educational plan. This study expands the literature on EAPs by providing additional context and description from the practitioner perspective and by delineating the EAP's strategy to strengthen advising programming at the community college level.

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Academic advising at the community college level is often characterized by high student-advisor ratios, rushed advising sessions, fragmented and incomprehensive delivery, conflicting information, long waiting periods for advising, lack of assigned advisors, and little planning or follow-up beyond the first semester (Community College Research Center [CCRC], 2013a). Ideally, advising support is provided in an intensive manner to assist students with life and career goal exploration in alignment with academic program choice to create a clear academic plan (Gordon, 2006; O'Banion, 2012). Although this ideal form of advising requires substantial time and resources, due to budget constraints and the need to see large amounts of students in a short period of time, a typical advising session at the community college may only last 10-15 minutes, and the topic of the

session may be limited to developing a course schedule only for the upcoming semester (Jaggars & Fletcher, 2014). Considering that a higher percentage of students who enroll at community colleges are academically underprepared as compared to their peers at universities (McCabe, 2000), there is a clear need for community colleges to offer more robust student support through academic advising programs (CCRC, 2013b; Cooper, 2010).

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) identifies enhanced advising as an effective approach for supporting students at the community college level (2013b). Enhanced advising programs (EAPs) typically include the assignment of a specific academic advisor to each student, required student participation in advising activities, and intensive advising sessions that address both academic and nonacademic developmental topics (CCRC 2013a, 2013b; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). Recommendations for strategically implementing EAPs include the integration of career counseling, utilization of e-advising, delivery of needs-based developmental advising, and collaboration between advisors and faculty members on student metacognitive skill building (2013a).

While efforts to enhance programming are commonplace in higher education, the use of the label "enhanced advising program" to describe a particular model of academic advising at the community college level is relatively new. The CCRC's two-part practitioner packet on nonacademic student support research (2013a; 2013b) specifically employs this naming structure when referring to advising programs that typically feature assigned advisors, mandatory student participation, and/or a developmental approach. As community colleges consider answering the CCRC's call to action, it is important to clearly delineate the components of EAPs at community colleges through insider experiences. Though the

CCRC has outlined recommendations, the literature is missing a more descriptive elucidation of the beneficial characteristics and components of EAPs. Considering that the academic advisor is centrally tasked with delivering advising to students through EAPs, these professionals are a key source of insider information serving as a conduit between community college administrators and student participants. By exploring advisor experiences and perspectives within EAPs, the characteristics and components of EAPs can be more thoroughly examined to help guide future advances in the field of academic advising.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to summarize what is known about EAPs and the academic advisor role at community colleges. Though the use of the label “enhanced advising program” is relatively new, some studies have explored the impacts of EAPs. Both the CCRC (2013a) and Jaggars and Karp (2016) have referred to examples of EAPs in published research. Bettinger and Baker (2014) found positive effects of intensive coaching on persistence and completion through the program referred to as Inside-Track. Within a structured program, coaches were employed to work one-on-one with assigned students to encourage college completion by helping students identify avenues for overcoming both academic and nonacademic issues through regular meetings, contacts, and goal-setting activities. The study found that students were more likely to persist during the participation period and up to one year after completion of coaching. Scrivener et al. (2015) conducted a study related to the effects of Accelerated Studies in Associate Programs (ASAP) at City University of New York (CUNY). As a component of the structured wraparound program, student participation in comprehensive advising was mandatory. Students were assigned to a specific advisor during their first year of enrollment and were required to meet with an advisor a minimum of two times per semester. Advising sessions were longer than control group sessions and included planning related to both academic and nonacademic goal achievement. Students participating in ASAP were more likely to persist and, ultimately, graduate. Weiss et al. (2011) analyzed the Opening Doors for Students on Probation Program at Chaffey College. Through the program, faculty advisors met with students both within and outside of a student

success course to provide improved counseling support. Key findings from Weiss et al. (2011) included positive academic outcomes for students during the participation period and greater likelihood of participation in mandatory meetings or resources.

Criteria Associated with EAPs

While these examples provide a foundation for understanding the positive effects of EAPs, a more in-depth description of the inner workings of EAPs is needed. Therefore, this study considers advising programs that include the three criteria for EAPs identified by the CCRC (2013a; 2013b): intensive developmental advising sessions, assigned advisors, and mandatory student participation. Strategies and topics related to EAPs are further reviewed and described in the following literature review.

Intensive developmental advising. An established advising approach closely aligned to EAPs is intensive developmental advising. Through this approach, the advisor seeks to establish shared responsibility in the overall development of the student toward educational, personal and career goals (Crookston, 1994; Grites, 2013; Winston et al., 1984). Developmental advising is a holistic approach for facilitating student growth which relies on a strong advisor-student relationship (Winston et al., 1984). A key underpinning to this approach is the developmental advising process as a learning opportunity for both the student and the advisor, as well as a teaching opportunity for the advisor (Grites, 2013).

Assigned advisors. The assignment of a single advisor to a student is far from atypical in advising programs; however, the single advisor structure is less frequently utilized at the community college. In a survey, NACADA (2011b) found that 31.8% of two-year college respondents reported assigning academic advisors, compared to 56.0% of public baccalaureate institution respondents. A study by Donaldson et al. (2016) reported that students attributed rapport with an advisor to the assignment of and multiple meetings with a single advisor.

Mandatory student participation. Advising may be delivered to students as an optional resource, or participation in advising may be considered mandatory by the institution. Glennan and Baxley (1985) established the need for mandatory advising based on the principle that advisors should not assume that students know when or how to seek advising support, nor should they assume students are aware of all pertinent

questions to ask advisors. First-generation students entering a community college may not self-identify issues or seek assistance on their own (Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). The intrusive and proactive approaches to advising are closely related to the concept of mandatory advising. Earl (1988) established that interventions can be deployed to teach new students how to overcome the challenges of orientating to the college environment and that such interventions should not rely on student motivation but should be intrusively provided based on student need. Varney (2013) defined proactive advising as a strategic intervention designed to promote student motivation, establish student-advisor engagement, support student success, inform students of available options, and address issues before they exacerbate. Mandatory advising is less common at community colleges than at public universities. According to a 2011 survey, only 20.5% of two-year institution respondents indicated that advising was mandatory, compared to 56% at public baccalaureate institutions (NACADA, 2011a).

Strategic recommendations for EAPs. As aforementioned, this study considers the recommendations made by the CCRC (2013a) for strategic advising to strengthen EAPs at community colleges. The CCRC recommends utilization of the SSIP (sustained, strategic, intrusive and integrated, and personalized) approach for identifying activities to strengthen EAPs. Within the SSIP framework, the CCRC promotes the use and long-term sustainment of strategic advising support based on student need.

The CCRC also encourages community colleges to integrate career advising into academic advising (2013a). This recommendation is echoed in step two of O'Banion's (2012) advising model, in which advisors support students with the exploration of vocational goals as they relate to program and course selection. Gordon (2006) described the integration of career and academic advising as a process that "helps students understand how their personal interests, abilities, and values might predict success in the academic and career fields they are considering and how to form their academic and career goals accordingly" (p. 12). This directly connects to Super's (1976) developmental self-concept theory that places emphasis on stages of life and career development.

Another recommendation for enhanced advising programs is the integration of e-advising to support in-person advising (CCRC, 2013a). The

CCRC specifically frames e-advising systems as access to "online advising resources" that supplement face-to-face advising. Margolin et al. (2013) found that community college websites serve as a potential source of advising information for students but that institutions typically struggle to provide useful information in a user-friendly manner. In addition to enhancing the information available to students on the college website, Jaggars and Karp (2016) recommended leveraging more e-advising systems to track students and identify those at risk. There are various risks and benefits associated with e-advising. To ensure e-advising is successful, for example, students must be taught how to self-advise (Jaggars & Karp, 2016). On the other hand, although face-to-face advising cannot be replaced by e-advising, the high cost of increasing human capital to provide intensive advising to each student creates the need for less expensive pathways to deliver key information that supplements face-to-face advising (CCRC, 2013a).

Advisors and faculty members are also encouraged to collaborate to establish common learning goals related to metacognitive skill-building programs both inside and outside the classroom. One such method for doing so is the utilization of student success courses (CCRC, 2013c). Student success courses address metacognitive skills such as time management and learning strategies while serving as an opportunity for faculty members to integrate student services functions like academic planning into the curriculum (CCRC 2013c). This recommendation underscores advising's foundation as a teaching role in which the advisor seeks to facilitate student learning (Drake, 2013). The advisor is tasked with teaching students to successfully navigate the college experience in both academic and cocurricular aspects (Drake, 2013).

Academic Advisors at the Community College

Given that academic advisors at community colleges represent a key source of insider information related to EAPs, it is important to provide background information and context related to these advisors' roles and characteristics. Two of the most common types of academic advisors are primary-role advisors and faculty advisors (Pardee, 2004). Primary-role advisors are typically hired for the sole purpose of advising students and usually do not have faculty status or the requirement to teach courses at the institution. Faculty advisors, on the other hand,

typically deliver advising outside of the classroom as a portion of their contractual duties. Faculty advising is generally focused on topics related to the student's field of study, with less emphasis placed on nonacademic topics. According to a 2011 survey, 86% of 2-year institutions utilized primary-role academic advisors and 82% utilized full-time faculty members. Additionally, 96% of two-year colleges required at a minimum that academic advisors had completed a bachelor's degree, while 58% required at least a master's degree (Self, 2013). This makes it clear that most community colleges employ a multifaceted approach involving both primary-role and faculty advisors (Self, 2013). Primary-role academic advisors are a particular focus of this study.

Through this literature review, the existing body of research related to EAPs and the role of the academic advisor at the community college level were examined. EAPs, as defined in this study, are relatively new and warrant further exploration in order to provide a rich description of their characteristics and components. The academic advisor is uniquely situated to provide a deeper understanding of EAPs, and this study analyzes the perspectives of such advisors. In the following sections, the purpose and research questions of the study are established and study design methods are reviewed.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to develop a rich description and deeper understanding of the characteristics and components of EAPs at community colleges from the perspective of primary-role advisors. In this study, an EAP is defined based on the three primary components established in the literature (CCRC 2013b; Jaggars & Karp, 2016), including intensive developmental advising sessions, assigned advisors, and mandatory student participation.

The following research question was established to explore the stated purpose of the study and to guide data collection:

RQ1. What do primary-role academic advisors employed within an EAP identify as the distinguishing characteristics and components of EAPs?

For this study, a characteristic is defined as a primary quality of the EAP, whereas a component

is defined as a specific part of the EAP that supports a given characteristic.

Methods

This study seeks to develop an understanding of participants' subjective experiences within specific contexts through the lens of a constructivist worldview (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative inquiry serves as an appropriate research approach when investigators seek to understand the meaning individuals attach to a social phenomenon or problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within the qualitative approach, a basic qualitative inquiry design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was employed to investigate the stated purpose of the study. Research in a basic qualitative study seeks to understand "the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Through this type of qualitative research design, the perspectives and experiences of academic advisors employed within an EAP were examined to provide an in-depth description of the components of EAPs. The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with academic advisors.

Site Description

The study took place at a large and diverse Texas community college with a Fall 2016 credit enrollment of more than 50,000 students. For the purposes of the study, a pseudonym is used for the name of the research site: Texas State Community College (TSCC). At TSCC, specific academic advisors are employed to work within the EAP and are assigned to new students entering the college having earned fewer than 12 college-level course credits. The program at TSCC is hereafter referred to as the Enhanced Advising Program (EAP).

The EAP was established in 2012 as a structured program with prescribed activities. At TSCC, students entering college for the first time are required to enroll in a student success course based on their discipline. Advisors are matched to student success courses, where they serve as the assigned advisor for the students enrolled in the section. Advising objectives and activities are identified in the advising syllabus, and participation in the program is considered mandatory as a condition for registration the following semester. Specific learning objectives are outlined in the program syllabus as follows:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to

make effective decisions concerning their degree and career goals.

- Students will develop an educational plan for successfully achieving their goals that includes understanding the Interactive Academic Advising Report (iAAR) and planning future course enrollment through the Academic Planner.
- Students will become familiar with the information and functions within their student account.
- Students will become familiar with student policies and procedures.
- Students will become familiar with and utilize campus resources and services to assist in achieving academic, personal, and career goals.

Furthermore, advisees are required to meet with their advisor twice within the first semester of enrollment. The advising syllabus outlines specific areas of focus for each advising session. In the first session, advisors confirm the student's declared program of study and career goals, review the interactive advising report and electronic academic planner, and discuss important dates on the academic calendar. In the second advising session, advisors review with the advisee a completed academic planner, discuss academic progress, prepare for registration for the next semester, and discuss important dates and deadlines. Advisors track student completion of advising sessions in the internal TSCC student information system using a checklist application/function. If students do not complete both required sessions, a hold is placed on their record that prevents future enrollment until the program requirements have been satisfied.

Participants

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve senior academic advisors employed within the EAP during the Spring 2017 semester. Interviews were arranged based on advisor willingness to participate in the study and were held until a point of saturation was achieved in like responses and descriptions (Charmaz, 2006). To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to advisors and basic self-reported background information is provided in summary form without being attached to a specific advisor persona. Of the advisors interviewed, an equal number of men and women participated (six each). The interviewed advisors

held graduate degrees related to counseling ($n = 7$), social work ($n = 2$), cultural studies ($n = 1$), communication ($n = 1$), and business administration ($n = 1$). Self-identified racial/ethnic backgrounds of the interviewees included Black or African-American ($n = 6$), Hispanic ($n = 4$), Asian ($n = 1$), and Caucasian ($n = 1$). The average years of overall advising related experience was 17.6 (median: 12; range: 5-42), and, specifically for the senior advising role at TSCC, the average years of experience was 3.8 (median: 5; range: 6 months to 5 years).

The academic advisors who deliver advising via the EAP are full-time, primary-role advisors who are titled "senior academic advisors." The senior advisor role for the EAP at TSCC was established in 2012. At this level, the position requires a master's degree and at least three years of higher education experience in student services related roles. At the time of this study, TSCC employed 34 senior academic advisors. Advisor caseloads are determined based on enrollment in student success course sections. Sections of student success courses are divided across the senior academic advisors based on advisor and course location. For the 2016-2017 academic year, the median advisor self-reported caseload was 167 students per semester.

Interviews and Data Collection

A protocol was established to guide the interview process. The protocol design was guided by recommendations from Carspecken (1996) that included establishing semi-structured interview questions that center on topic domains, are guided by lead-off questions, and continue with follow-up questions based on covert categories for each topic domain. Interviews were conducted in a conference room at the TSCC campus. The primary investigator audio recorded each interview and took detailed written notes. Both written notes and audio recordings were used for preparing the transcription for final analysis.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to allow findings to emerge from the data. A coding process informed by Carspecken (1996) was utilized that included the initial tagging of statements with descriptive terms referred to as low-level codes. The low-level coding process began with the first interview and continued after each interview. A point of saturation (Charmaz,

Table 1. Thematic coding process example

| Interview Data | Low-Level Codes | High-Level Code | Theme |
|---|--|--|--|
| “As long as the holds are not on there, they go and come and blow you off and say, hey, this is not important.” | Consequences; Motivation; Mandatory Participation | Consequences for lack of participation | Improving student participation in academic advising |
| “When you just have an option, it’s not something that they feel is important.” | Motivation; Mandatory Participation Optional | Mandatory advising participation | |

2006) was reached when the frequency of development of new, unique low-level codes was significantly reduced. High-level codes were created based on abstraction of and relationships observed between low-level codes (Carspecken, 1996). The primary investigator completed the initial coding process independently. Codes identified by a secondary investigator were incorporated into the initial coding structure, and any discrepancies between investigators were resolved by both investigators coming to an agreement on the best descriptive representation of the code in question. The final step in the thematic analysis process was for high-level codes to be abstracted under broadly stated themes based on relationships between codes. The initial thematic analysis structure was developed by the primary investigator. The investigative team as a whole participated in determining the final thematic structure by engaging with the interview data. In the reporting of the results, themes serve as the major categories and high-level codes serve as subsections within each theme. An abbreviated example of this process is outlined in Table 1.

Trustworthiness

Several elements were incorporated into the study to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry in alignment with recommendations from Merriam and Tisdell (2016). First, member checks were utilized with the interview population to ensure interview content accurately aligned with intended meanings from participants. As discussed in the interview protocol and thematic analysis sections, the primary investigator continued interviews until a point of saturation was achieved to ensure adequate engagement in data collection. Second, multiple investigators

were utilized in establishing the study methodology, forming the thematic analysis structure, and finalizing the coding process. Third, a clear audit trail and description of key activities and decision points related to the development of this study was maintained throughout the research process. Finally, to address maximum verification, this study provided multiple viewpoints from a diverse sample of advisors in terms of gender, racial/ethnic background, years of experiences, and professional development. Based on these techniques for trustworthiness, the findings will be explained to enhance understanding of EAPs for community college advising practice.

Findings

The findings, which are based on thematic analysis of the study data, offer structure and depth for understanding EAPs. Three major themes emerged that are supported by sub-themes. These major themes are: (1) improved student participation in academic advising; (2) stronger engagement with advising; and (3) proactive construction of an educational plan. These three themes are considered characteristics of EAPs. Due to the process and outcomes of thematic coding, sub-themes also emerged that further augmented the description of the theme. These sub-themes are referred to as components of the characteristics. Together, the characteristics and components offer depth for understanding EAPs.

Improved Student Participation in Academic Advising

Advisors believed a beneficial characteristic of the EAP is improved student participation in academic advising. EAPs increase the likeliness that students will engage in advising sessions and with advising resources. Through the requirement

of student participation, provision of support and reinforcement for participation, utilization of group advising sessions, and availability of effective electronic resources, students are more likely to participate in advising. Advisors also noted that EAPs allow advisors to move past a student's potential lack of initial motivation to seek out advising support. Paramount to this perspective is the concern that students may not seek out support on their own, even when a need exists. Various reasons were offered as to why students may not be likely to seek support or assistance with academic planning. Advisors remarked on how busy the life of a community college student can be, as many try to juggle career, family, and college at the same time. The key components that emerged in relation to this beneficial characteristic of EAPs are further discussed below.

Requiring student participation. Advisors reported that an EAP would not be effective without requiring student participation. Advisors also noted that mandatory advising is a key component to student follow-through with advising activities and scheduled appointments. Brianna described the importance of required advising for community college students:

At first, I didn't like the mandatory [participation] because at the end of the day we're all dealing with young adults and they do have a right to make a decision, but as you're working with some students at the community college, you notice that they need that extra push.

Employing mandatory advising removes the reliance on student self-motivation to seek help and changes advising resources from an optional benefit to something required of students to progress toward their educational goals.

Supporting and reinforcing participation. Advisors discussed the importance of support and reinforcement for students who may not follow through on required advising activities. Multiple advisors commented that, in past semesters, the EAP lacked clear consequences for non-participation other than the missed opportunity for developing a comprehensive pathway. Describing the need for student record holds, Karen stated, "As long as the holds are not on there, they go and come and blow you off and say, hey, this is not important." Advisors noted the added extrinsic motivation these holds delivered, as students who

were previously unreachable began contacting their advisor once the hold was put in place.

Employing group advising sessions. In addition to individual sessions, TSCC also employs group advising sessions that take place in the student success course classroom. Daniel observed that "a lot of students respond better when they are in a group of people rather than by themselves." In terms of engagement, some advisors believed that a student may be better served and more likely to engage in a group session rather than an individual session. While some students may thrive and open up in an individualized setting, others may benefit from the learning environment of a group session through peer collaboration and by hearing answers to questions posed by other students that the student may not have asked in an individual session. Advisors believed that taking advising to the classroom and, therefore, where the student is, should be incorporated into EAPs to complement one-on-one sessions and reach students who may not have otherwise participated in EAP activities.

Effective electronic resources. Advisors discussed the importance of accessible and effective advising-related information on the college website. A combination of student-based technology deficiencies and institution-based technology inefficiencies were perceived as a barrier to successful participation in advising within the EAP. Multiple advisors mentioned that the TSCC website was cluttered and difficult to navigate. Others noted that the Interactive Academic Advisement Report (iAAR) that displays a student's degree plan and tracks progress is not user-friendly and may be inaccurate. Advisors observed that TSCC had recently committed to upgrading the student website experience and creating a single student-specific portal that connects resources and platforms. Ava reported that she was "so glad that [TSCC] is revamping the website because it is much easier to find information on the [TSCC] website right now. So that's extremely important."

To summarize, a key beneficial characteristic of EAPs identified by advisors in this study is the potential to improve student participation in advising activities. Improving student participation depends upon several components of EAPs, including requiring student participation, offering support and reinforcement for participation, employing group advising sessions, and providing effective electronic resources. The next theme examines how EAPs facilitate stronger student engagement with academic advising.

Stronger Engagement with Advising

Academic advisors interviewed for the study noted that a central characteristic of EAPs is the facilitation of stronger student engagement with advising. Advisors reported that learning more about the educational and career goals of each student, as well as students' specific concerns and personalities, allows the opportunity to offer services and information that better align with the individual needs of advisees. Stronger student engagement is accomplished through the assignment of advisors to individual students, by establishing rapport between advisor and advisee, and by individualizing advising. Each of these components is integral to fostering stronger student engagement with advising.

Assigned advisors. Advisors suggested that the assignment of a specific advisor to each student creates an opportunity to build a relationship that allows for a more individualized and valuable advising experience. Advisors highlighted the importance of a student meeting with someone who already knows them and their academic goals so that the student does not have to repeat their background and needs to a new advisor at each meeting point. Students are afforded an opportunity to establish a trusted "go-to" person whenever support is needed. Luis provided an example of the potential impact individualized support can have:

You know, I never know the end result of what we do, but I do feel that it impacts the students' lives, whether a lot or a little, I don't know. I was very touched by a lady. . . I was in a hurry to leave one night [. . .] and I hear this little lady say, "Mr. [advisor's name], Mr. [advisor's name]," and I started walking backwards because I wanted to go. "Hey, wait, wait, I just want to say, thank you." She said, "I don't know if you remember me, but two years ago or three years ago, I was about to quit and I came and saw you because we have to sign for the drops and I wanted to drop all my courses because things were bad that semester and you said 'try and salvage the semester because after this one you only have one semester. Four courses and you're finished.' Well I stayed, I passed it and I passed the next one and I got my Associate of Arts. I wasn't sure I wanted to go to the university, but I did, and I got my bachelor's degree. And tonight, I come here asking for another

transcript because I'm going to graduate school."

These services and support structures can sometimes seem insignificant, even to the advisors who provide them, though it is clear that the benefits of individualized support can be far-reaching.

Establishing rapport. Rapport was defined through interviews with advisors as the development of a relationship in which the advisor and advisee learn more about each other, fostering trust and a feeling of openness with one another. As Jessie described it:

You build a better relationship and they feel more comfortable with telling you things that they normally would not tell you. It opens them up to share more about what's going on because it's not just the academics, it's everything that's going on in their lives.

Advisors suggested that as rapport is developed, there emerges a beneficial opportunity for students to receive individualized support addressing a myriad of different issues specific to their needs.

Individualized support. Developing a relationship and rapport through the EAP allowed advisors to individualize support by asking questions related to student-specific topics and receiving honest feedback from the student. This extends advising beyond degree planning activities such as major selection and course scheduling. Individualized support fosters an opportunity to answer questions related to the student's acclimation to the college experience, manage student enrollment concerns, and connect students to available resources on campus based on need. Daniel discussed his goal for students to see him as a resource and advocate:

You build a better relationship [in which] they have an advocate for them, first and foremost. My priority is for them to know they have someone they can talk to and they can get help from. You have those students who are confident and they know what they are going to do and they just need us to kind of check-in, but there are other students who need us to [. . .] guide them through the whole process. I hope that students get that they have someone that's in their corner.

Advisors reported examples such as the opportunity to refer a struggling math student to tutoring services or a student coping with the loss of a loved one to the counseling department.

Stronger engagement with advising is a key characteristic of EAPs as identified by advisors in this study. This engagement is possible through the components of EAPs that include assigned advisors, advisor efforts to establish rapport, and individualized support in advising sessions. The next theme to be discussed is how EAPs foster the proactive construction of an educational plan.

Proactive Construction of an Educational Plan

Another beneficial characteristic of the EAP as reported by advisors is the opportunity to proactively guide a student through the process of constructing a comprehensive educational plan. Advisors report that most students enter their first semester with little knowledge about educational planning. Beth summarized this by noting that “the majority of students don’t know what they want to do or have no vision of how to get there. They may have an idea of what they want to do, but no plan of how to get there.” Academic advisors suggested that the proactive construction of an educational plan is facilitated by EAPs through degree and course mapping, transfer planning, advising beyond degree planning, and assisting students with plan adjustments.

Degree and course mapping. In relation to degree planning, students are able to access a list of required courses for a specific program from the college website or through the electronic advisement report. However, advisors noted that these lists often contain multiple course options that satisfy a degree requirement, as well as courses that should be completed in a particular order, resulting in confusion and/or poor planning if selected without support. Nearly all the advisors interviewed felt strongly that students who comprehensively plan out courses as part of the EAP have a clear plan outlined toward goal completion and a better understanding of time to degree. Daniel explained that he “found that [...] those students who are actually spending that time, putting that time into the planner, they have a definitive plan they can go to and they don’t have to come to me as much.” This can be especially informative to students on a part-time enrollment track who may not understand that a two- or four-year degree is typically achieved by completing approximately fifteen credit hours per fall and spring semester.

Completing an individual plan with an advisor allows a student to see their pathway laid out by semester, which can provide the student with critical information on appropriate course load and adjustment of priorities.

Transfer planning. Several advisors noted the importance of quality transfer advising. Academic advisors discussed guiding EAP students on program and course options best suited to not only satisfy TSCC’s associate degree plan but also cover degree requirements at their university of choice. Advisors reported working with students to compare course options to help them maximize course selection efficiency. Jada provided a summary of what her transfer advising process looks like:

I print out the transfer guide to the school they’re looking at, or schools if it’s more than one. In the case of the student that I met with yesterday, there are two transfer plans, the B.A. and the B.S., and he ended up choosing the B.A. So, I try to cover all of that and I make the student aware of what classes are not covered in the Academic Planner so that they are aware that those are things that they still need to factor in. And then for the electives, I let them know to do that at the end, as well as the math and science. In the student case that I had yesterday, he was already taking Math for Liberal Arts, so I let him know that one of the math classes [was] going to have to count as an elective.

Advisors noted that students find the process of concurrent degree planning to fulfill community college requirements as well as transfer to a university to be confusing, so the opportunity to review transfer planning decisions with an advisor is particularly beneficial and avoids potential errors.

Advising beyond degree planning. Advisors stressed that comprehensive educational planning extends beyond mapping out courses and meeting institutional degree requirements; it also includes addressing and planning for student-specific issues such as work and family obligations or referrals to on-campus/community resources specific to student needs. Luis said he hopes that after students participate in the EAP, “they are more familiar with the resources that are available to them, like the library, career services, also how to find information.” Daniel reported making it a goal to discuss “any of the barriers [students] feel they have” and

to “go into discussions about barriers: financial aid, or if you’re having problems with an instructor that has an accent.”

Facilitating plan adjustments. Several advisors noted that even students who appear well prepared and enter college with a clear pathway may benefit from academic planning within the EAP. Some students think they are on the right track but “don’t know that they’re lost,” according to Diego. Daniel explained this succinctly by noting:

I think they have an idea, but so many of our students come in and they say they printed something online and this is what [they] want to do and a lot of times that stuff is not updated so they think they are knowledgeable but they need to be corrected... They don’t really have the knowledge that they need about their degree plan.

With so many options available to students, from academic to technical programs of varying lengths and content, the EAP offers advisors the opportunity to reduce confusion and lay out a clear path for students to accomplish their goals.

Advisors reported that the proactive construction of an educational plan is a beneficial characteristic of EAPs. This characteristic is supported by the components of EAPs that include degree and course mapping, transfer planning, advising beyond degree planning, and facilitating plan adjustments. In the following section, the results of this study will be further discussed and placed in context with the established literature.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a deeper description of the distinguishing characteristics and components of EAPs from the perspective of academic advisors employed within an EAP program. Though the general concept of enhanced advising programming is common in the higher education community, framing a specific program of advising at the community college level under the term EAP is relatively new. The characteristics as perceived by academic advisors interviewed in this study include improved student participation in academic advising, stronger engagement with advising, and proactive construction of an educational plan. This study contributes to the literature related to EAPs and offers additional insights for

implementing such programs at community colleges. Context and description are also added to the components of EAPs previously identified in the literature (CCRC 2013a; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). In this section, the findings of the study are discussed in relation to the established literature, and recommendations are made for advising policy and practice.

This study confirms that mandatory student participation is a key component of EAPs (CCRC 2013a; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). However, additional context was added. In this study, required advising serves as one of the key components related to improving student participation in advising. Other key components include providing adequate support and reinforcing participation by tying EAP activities to grades within a student success course and preventing future enrollment before specific EAP activities are completed, utilizing group advising sessions to expand the reach of advising, and providing effective electronic advising resources to supplement face-to-face advising meetings. The benefit of mandatory participation echoes findings from Upcraft and Kramer (1995) that students may not choose to self-identify issues or seek assistance on their own, even when needed. Findings also support Earl’s (1988) claim that students can be taught to overcome challenges with the orientation-to-college process and that such support should not rely on student motivation alone but should be intrusively provided through advising. This study further supports research related to the need to improve e-advising systems in order to expand the reach of advising programs and supplement face-to-face meetings (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Margolin et al., 2013). Advisors reported that students struggled to navigate degree planning resources and information on the college website due to inefficient navigation, confusing language, and sometimes inaccurate information. Each of the components of EAPs, including mandatory advising, is related to improved student participation in advising.

Findings of this study also confirm that assigning a single, specific advisor to an advisee is a beneficial component of EAPs (CCRC 2013a; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). This study adds context to previous findings that advisor assignment, in EAPs combined with additional components, fosters stronger student engagement in advising. Other beneficial components include advisor efforts to establish rapport and personalize advising. The importance of establishing rapport is supported by

the relational component of the NACADA (2017) Core Competency Model. Furthermore, advisors echoed the finding from Donaldson et al. (2016) that advisor assignment combined with establishing rapport allows an opportunity for more meaningful conversation between advisor and advisee. Rapport between advisor and advisee relates back directly to Earl's (1988) belief that academic integration is a strong factor in persistence.

Another key component of EAPs identified in the literature is the utilization of the developmental advising approach (CCRC 2013a; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). Elements of developmental advising are present in the findings of this study. For example, the need for the identified component of individualized advising support and the beneficial characteristic of proactive construction of a comprehensive educational plan were highlighted by the advisors interviewed within the study. Advisors noted that advising activities should extend beyond degree planning to consider students' personal challenges and goals, which is a key tenant of developmental advising (Crookston, 1994; Grites, 2013; Winston et al., 1984). However, when discussing EAP activities, advisors mostly focused on degree and transfer planning. While the developmental advising approach (Grites, 2013) places additional importance on career planning, emphasis on this topic was limited in the study. Moreover, despite the fact that advisors utilized an advising syllabus that listed prescribed outcomes, little information emerged that would establish advising as teaching at the level discussed by Drake (2013). During this process, the advising syllabus and prescribed learning outcomes for the EAP were not mentioned by the advisors interviewed.

Implications

The findings of this study extend knowledge related to EAPs at the community college by identifying characteristics and components that provide implications for future use. Several implications for practice and policy related to EAPs extend from this study. Mandatory student participation was a key component to increasing student participation in advising in this study, but support and reinforcement for participation was also necessary to ensure student follow-through. Advisors discussed the need for reinforcements such as policy implementation that prevents registration for future terms until advising requirements are met. Advising administrators and leaders

should explore additional methods for supporting and reinforcing required participation, such as adopting policy that rewards students for engaging with advisors and the advising process. For example, meeting advising goals in a timely manner might be incentivized with early registration or priority parking spaces. The focus is on policy that acknowledges the positive impact of advising on the student experience.

Another key component was the utilization of group advising sessions. By visiting with students in a group format, either inside or outside of the classroom, advisors reported being able to more adequately manage their caseloads while reaching more students, some of whom may not have completed a one-on-one advising session without first participating in the group session. One example of a systematic approach to group advising is Bentley-Gadow and Silverson's (2005) sequential advising model developed for freshman students at the University of Northern Iowa. This approach consists of two formal phases. In the first phase, important information concerning new student orientation and pre-registration is delivered to incoming students via large group meetings. The second phase focuses on delivering major-specific information to clusters of students in small group sessions. Advising administrators should consider intentionally developing group advising models such as the sequential advising model (Bentley-Gadow & Silverson, 2005) for inclusion in EAPs to support student participation.

The assignment of an advisor also emerged as a key component of EAPs, and this component should be viewed in relation to fostering stronger student engagement in advising. Advising administrators should consider opportunities to support the development of rapport between advisor and advisee. This includes providing individualized support to students. Motivational interviewing is a potential strategy for providing individualized support, as this method places focus on issues students are motivated to address (Hughey & Pettay, 2013). A method for individualized advising support within motivational interviewing is the OARS technique (Miller & Rollnick, 2013), a process that includes advisor utilization of open-ended questions, affirming statements, reflection on students' comments, and summarizing. Additionally, administrators should provide professional development opportunities and support related to strategies for enhancing personal relationships and establishing rapport between the advisor and advisee. Hughey (2011) stresses the importance

of observant reflection, utilizing probing questions, challenging and confronting advisees, and initiating and maintaining change. Advising administrators should consider incorporating approaches such as motivational interviewing and relationship-building strategies within EAPs to further strengthen the benefits of advisor assignment and foster deeper student engagement with advising.

Establishing an advising syllabus for an EAP is a key activity in outlining the role of advising programs (Trabant, 2006). To ensure follow-through, advising units should consider employing assessments and measures for student learning outcomes related to the EAP. Advising within an EAP should be viewed as a teaching and learning endeavor, similar to faculty instruction within a course (Drake, 2013). Carefully crafted student learning outcomes should guide program activities, and both direct and indirect measures should be developed to assess student progress toward stated outcomes (Robbins, 2011). Assessment results should guide discussion on programmatic improvement and development of action plans to use assessment results to implement change (Robbins, 2011). An assessment system based on student learning outcomes can aid advising units in identifying areas within the EAP program that need additional plans for improvements.

Future research should seek to build upon the characteristics and components of EAPs identified in this study in order to develop a deeper understanding of the beneficial aspects of EAPs as well as the challenges with implementing such programs. For example, collecting data from students would expand the description of EAPs to include the complexity that emerges through the advisor-student relationship. This study offers numerous implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, the findings of this study come from academic advisors' perspectives within one localized EAP setting. Thus, the results may not be readily transferrable to other advising programs in different contexts. Second, due to the collection of interview data at a single point in time, participant responses to interview questions may not fully capture more nuanced experiences related to student engagement in EAPs over a longer period of time. Third, data from this study were limited to the perspectives of academic advisors, and al-

though the advisor is a key source of information and is uniquely positioned within an EAP, data from additional populations such as student participants, advising administrators, and faculty members could contribute additional perspectives related to the EAP approach.

Conclusion

This study provides a rich description and understanding of the characteristics and components of EAPs at the community college level from the perspective of academic advisors. The study identifies the following key characteristics of EAPs: improved student participation in academic advising, stronger engagement with advising, and proactive construction of an educational plan. Results of this study expand upon previously established descriptions of EAPs in the advising literature (CCRC, 2013b; Jaggars & Karp, 2016) through the identification of beneficial characteristics and related components that should be considered for implementation of EAPs. The study offers advising administrators and leaders at community colleges an intricate understanding of EAPs for future contributions to the institutional mission for student success if adoption is thoughtful and includes synergy among practice, process, and policy.

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